

United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest Service

Intermountain  
Region

Targhee  
National  
Forest



# **Record of Decision Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the Revised Forest Plan**



# Table of Contents

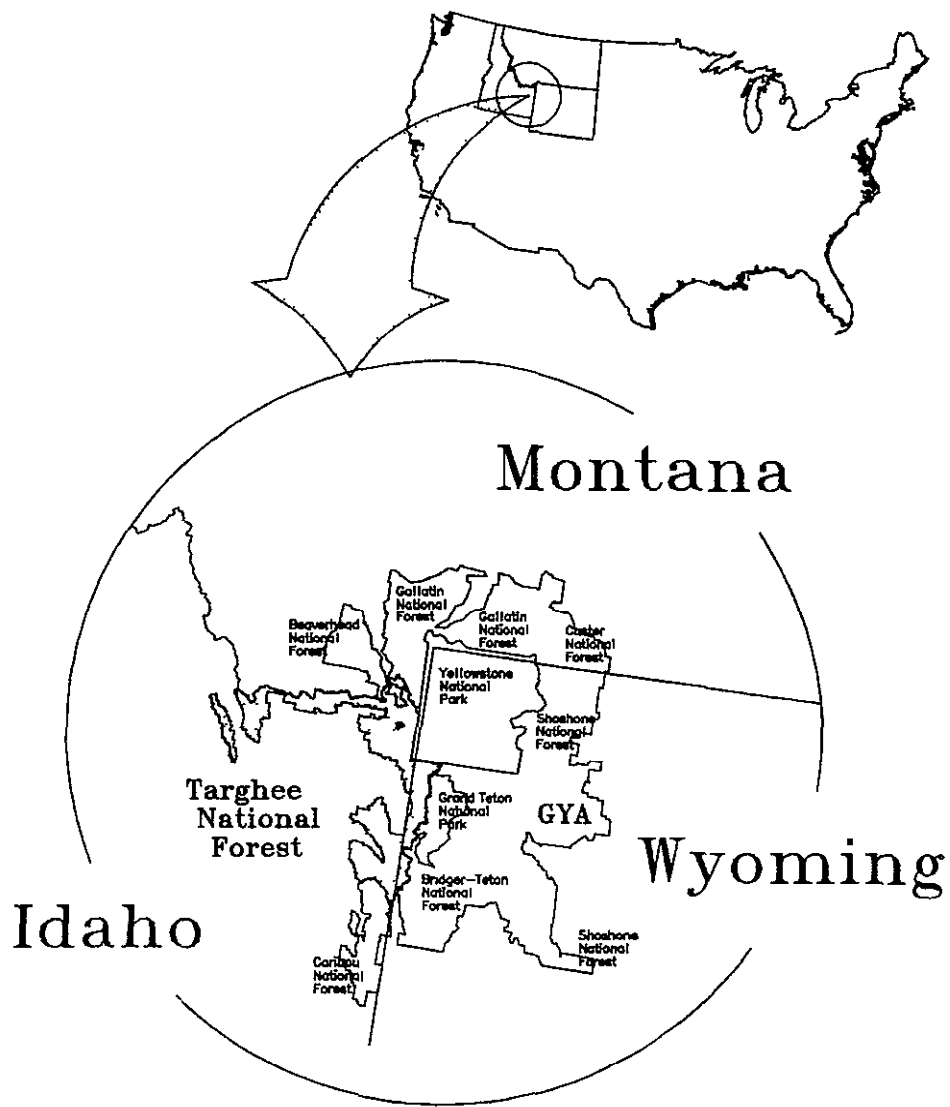
INTRODUCTION	2
The Decision - An Overview	3
NEED FOR CHANGE AND DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS	5
PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND THE REVISION PROCESS	6
Planning Records	7
ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED	8
Objectives Shared by All Alternatives	8
Alternative Descriptions	9
REASONS FOR THE DECISION	12
Components of the Decision and Comparison to the 1985 Plan	13
Comparison of Alternatives' Response to the Key Issues and Changes Made in response to Other	
Decision Factors	18
Other Decision Factors	24
FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS	28
The Environmentally Preferred Alternative	28
IMPLEMENTATION	30
APPEAL	31
CONCLUSION	32

## INTRODUCTION

The Targhee National Forest covers approximately 1.8 million acres (this includes the portion of the *Caribou National Forest* which is administered by the Targhee). The majority of the Forest lies in eastern Idaho and the remainder in western Wyoming. Situated next to Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks, the Forest lies almost entirely within the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem.

The Forest serves as a home for many plant and animal species. It also offers a wide range of recreation opportunities year-round, as well as a unique setting for a diversified local economy. The Targhee Forest personnel anticipate that over the next decade, more people will discover the Targhee and compete for its resources and services.

Vicinity Map of Targhee National Forest on a National Scale



## The Decision - An Overview

This document presents my decision for a Revised Land and Resource Management Plan (Revised Plan or Revised Forest Plan) for the Targhee National Forest. It explains the reasons I have selected the Preferred Alternative 3M, as presented in the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Alternative 3M is the basis for the Revised Forest Plan which will guide the management activities for the Targhee National Forest for the next 10 to 15 years.

We are embracing the concept of adaptive management in this Revised Forest Plan. From a strategic perspective, this means that

- We will adjust our management if our strategies do not move us toward the achievement of the Revised Plan Desired Future Conditions, Goals and Objectives. New information will be incorporated as it becomes available.
- We will make decisions that leave future generations with as many options as possible.

Alternative 3M, as modified from the Draft EIS in response to public comment, responds to the issues in a reasoned, deliberate, comprehensive and equitable manner. I have selected Alternative 3M because it best meets the needs for change, positions the Forest Team to address the seven key issues in a balanced way and also addresses the other factors common to all alternatives in the Final EIS. Key features of Alternative 3M are (details provided in Chapter II of the FEIS)

- 1) Ecosystem Sustainability will be increased by allowing silvicultural treatments on 45,200 acres where forest structure can be maintained or improved during the next decade. Prescribed fire will also be allowed where appropriate to maintain or improve ecosystem health on 1,750,000 acres,
- 2) Desired Vegetative Conditions within aquatic influence zones will be improved by managing approximately 512,000 acres to promote health and function of riparian, wetland and aquatic ecosystems, ✓
- 3) Elk Security will be increased and, as a result 89 percent of the Forest will meet the state elk vulnerability threshold,
- 4) Grizzly Bear Habitat will be improved by managing almost 476,600 acres (Targhee portion within Grizzly Bear Recovery Zone) in a comprehensive strategy that provides "core" areas to ensure grizzly security and which reduces road and trail densities to the level needed to allow grizzly occupancy. Timing and other mitigation measures are applied to human activities within the recovery zone.
- 5) Reasonable access to the Forest by roads and trails open for motorized use will be provided on a system of designated routes. However, motorized road and trail density will be reduced to achieve the road density standards for each management prescription area. This means that during the next decade, 20 percent (408 miles) of roads will be closed and 30 percent (233 miles) of motorized trails will be closed. Acres currently available for off-highway vehicle use will be reduced by 90 percent, to about 121,000 acres. These changes are necessary to improve elk security, improve grizzly bear habitat and prevent other resource damage.

6) Roadless Areas - 106,000 acres will be recommended to Congress for wilderness designation in addition to the 65,000 acres already recommended, for a total of 171,000 acres. With the current 134,166 acres designated as wilderness, and the 49,300 acres designated as a wilderness study area (the Targhee portion of the Palisades Roadless Area), a total of almost 354,500 acres will be managed to retain the wilderness character until Congress takes legislative action on the wilderness issue.

7) Timber Harvest is allowed at a sustainable level, not to exceed 80 MMBF for the decade. An estimated 20,520 acres of forest land suitable for timber production will be harvested. The use of timber harvest as a tool to meet ecosystem health objectives will also be allowed on forest land unsuited for timber production. This harvest will not exceed 20 MMBF for the decade.

The balance of these key issues is weighed within the capabilities of the land and Alternative 3M provides for sustainable ecosystems across the Forest. The reasons to support these statements are discussed in full in the "Reasons for the Decision" section that follows the description of all "Alternatives Considered."

The Forest Team will implement a monitoring and evaluation strategy to improve our understanding of ecosystems and our use of management activities to achieve ecosystem objectives. We also want to test our assumptions made during this analysis, to be able to adjust our management as needed. We have learned much from our monitoring efforts of the 1985 Targhee Forest Plan and now have a better idea of what needs to be monitored to assure we are moving toward our desired future conditions. It was the evaluation of past monitoring that identified the needs for change which began this revision process.

Monitoring and evaluation will be given a high priority as implementation work plans are developed each year. In the Monitoring and Evaluation Plan (Chapter V of the Revised Plan), I have prioritized the monitoring items into three categories. First priorities are:

- critical planning assumptions,
- activities with the greatest risk to resources,
- standards and guidelines that are potentially the most constraining on resource outputs.

Monitoring of the first priorities is mandatory. Monitoring of second and third priorities will occur as funds are available. The Forest Team will develop monitoring partnerships with Federal, State, local and other agencies to further shared goals.

The sections of this record that follow include: the needs for change and desired future conditions, public participation and the revision process, alternatives considered, the environmentally preferable alternative, reasons for the decision with comparisons of the 1985 Plan, changes made between draft and final EISs and responses of the alternatives to the key issues, findings required by other laws, implementation, and appeal.

## NEED FOR CHANGE AND DESIRED FUTURE CONDITIONS

A Revised Plan for the Targhee National Forest, as well as each Forest in the National Forest System, is required by the rules implementing the Forest and Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 (RPA), as amended by the National Forest Management Act of 1976 (NFMA). The purpose of a revised plan is to respond to the needs for change identified from the monitoring of the 1985 Plan and continue to provide multiple-use and sustained yield of goods and services from National Forest System lands in an environmentally sound manner. NFMA implementing regulations (36 CFR 219.10(g)) require a forest plan be revised on a 10 to 15 year schedule. This decision will remain in effect until this Revised Plan is revised, no later than 2012. In the final EIS, a 50-year planning period is used to project the environmental effects of alternative choices beyond the first decade for economic and timber harvest only. Short-term opportunities, problems, or conflicts may arise in managing the Forest that were not anticipated in the Revised Plan. When this occurs, the Plan can be adjusted through rescheduling activities, amendment, or revision.

The original Targhee Forest Plan, approved in 1985, emphasized an extensive salvage and reforestation program of dead lodgepole killed by a massive mountain pine beetle epidemic over the previous 30 years. This rate of salvage caused, in effect, a departure from a sustained yield of timber harvest and could not be continued beyond the first decade (1985 - 1995) in an environmentally sound manner. Monitoring of activities during this time showed it was increasingly difficult to meet the standards and guidelines in the 1985 Plan. New information on resource needs and various management practices became evident during this time, and by 1990 it was apparent that a full revision was needed. More specific needs for change are as follows:

- The salvage program has ended. Use of the many roads built during salvage operations by increasing numbers of people is causing unwanted effects to wildlife, riparian areas, and soil productivity.
- The need to review and incorporate new knowledge and techniques continues, especially in wildlife habitat management. For example, recent studies indicate motorized road and trail densities play a crucial role in availability of suitable habitat for elk and grizzly bears. Standards for management activities near nesting and foraging habitat for goshawks and other raptors are needed to protect these crucial areas. Results of studies analyzing fish habitat in the Upper Columbia River Basin are pointing out new ways to manage fisheries. Some of these findings have widespread implications that the revision process was intended to address.
- Although much of the lodgepole pine component on the Forest has been salvaged, there is still a need to use timber harvest as a tool to reach ecosystem objectives, supply a variety of timber products for local use, deter other epidemics like the mountain pine beetle outbreak, and manage the potential for a devastating wildfire, like the Yellowstone Wildfires of 1988.

Based on public, other resource management agencies, and Forest Service employee participation between 1991-1994, a set of goal statements emerged that collectively represent what ideal conditions would be for the Targhee National Forest. These statements, called "Desired Future Conditions for the Year 2007" are the foundation for the goals, objectives, standards and guidelines developed in the Revised Forest Plan. They have changed from the desired future conditions described in the 1985 Plan, reflecting changes in conditions and values of the local communities and knowledge gained over the decade. These titles of the desired future conditions also show how the analysis and documents are organized, and are described as follows:

### **Ecosystem Processes and Patterns Desired Future Conditions:**

A mosaic of age classes and types of vegetation are sustained through time and exist across the landscape. Natural disturbances such as insects, disease and fires continue their natural roles in the ecosystem. The Forest functions as an integral part of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem as well as adjacent systems, sustaining habitat and conditions necessary for free movement of wildlife.

### **Biological and Physical Desired Future Conditions:**

Riparian zones (aquatic influence zones) are healthy and productive. Aquatic systems are allowed to function naturally while protecting flows for downstream consumptive uses. Riparian area integrity contributes to productive fisheries and excellent water quality. Native plant and animal species are favored over undesirable non-native species and sustained populations of all native and desirable species thrive. Habitat conditions contribute toward the recovery of threatened, endangered and sensitive species.

### **Forest Use and Occupation Desired Future Conditions:**

Growing and diverse recreational, cultural, visual, historical, and prehistoric management, interpretive, and spiritual needs are accommodated based on the capability of the ecosystem to sustain these uses. Recreation use is managed to minimize conflicts between incompatible uses and provide high levels of satisfaction. Year-round human access is managed to provide both motorized and nonmotorized opportunities. A system of trails and support facilities exist which are compatible with resource capabilities. Roadless characteristics are preserved in the recommended wilderness areas and in existing wildernesses.

### **Production of Commodity Resources Desired Future Conditions:**

*try count*  
*①*  
Commodity production, such as timber, firewood, mining, livestock forage, or outfitting and guide services are conducted at sustainable levels and maintain the capability of the land to produce an even flow and variety of goods and services for present and future generations. Timber harvest, prescribed fires and livestock grazing are tools used to achieve desired ecological vegetation conditions. Forest products are provided to sustain social and economic values and needs of the local communities within limits which maintain ecosystem health.

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND THE REVISION PROCESS**

The Targhee National Forest Team conducted an extensive public involvement process that continues. The revision process began in December, 1990 when a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS) was issued in the Federal Register. The notice of intent announced our interest in identifying changed conditions and need to revise the 1985 Plan. We held an initial set of public meetings in 1991 in the six communities where Forest offices are located.

The Revision effort included involvement, coordination, and comments from federal, state and local agencies and the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes. Some participants included the State of Idaho (Fish and Game, Parks and Recreation), State of Wyoming Game and Fish, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Parks. Representatives of county and city governments were involved along with the Henry's Fork Watershed Council, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribal Council and tribal members. The Forest Team kept the public informed of revision progress through a series of newsletters and news releases. Our mailing list includes more than 3,500 persons and organizations.

A series of public meetings and field trips was held between October 1991 and January 1994 (13 total) to determine the public's vision regarding what the Targhee National Forest should look like, and what uses they desired. This vision became the desired future conditions described above, and are the basis for the goals and objectives developed for the Revised Plan. The interaction also worked to improve communication, provide opportunity for mutual problem solving and increased understanding among the public, government agencies, tribal nations, and Forest personnel.

The public and Forest staff identified issues and concerns that evolved into the seven key issues, and over 70 additional sub-issues. Alternative management strategies for the Targhee National Forest were developed in response to the seven key issues. The environmental effects on the sub-issues were analyzed and are summarized in the EIS. The public reviewed the preliminary alternatives at work sessions beginning in May 1994. In June 1995, two meetings focused solely on the access issue, specifically which roads and trails were proposed open for motorized use in each of the six alternatives.

After publication of the draft EIS and draft Revised Forest Plan in February 1996, the Forest Team held another series of public meetings beginning in March and continuing through June. At these meetings, Forest personnel answered questions, displayed how the Preferred Alternative 3M responded to the seven key issues, compared the differences in Forest management from the 1985 Plan to the preferred alternative, and discussed the proposed changes in access, which was the most controversial issue. Forest personnel held numerous meetings with interest groups (such as conservation and preservation, motorized and nonmotorized recreation users, timber industry, and others).

Six of the nine counties of the sixth district of elected officials in southeast Idaho chose to put two alternatives on an "advisory referendum" on the May 1996 primary ballot. Citizens were asked to vote on four issues. Ballot results indicated that the people who voted wanted more motorized access and more focus on commodity uses, and less attention to wildlife needs that impact motorized access. Not all issues addressed in the EIS were on the ballot.

The public comment period on the draft documents stretched from February 27 to June 27, 1996. We received 2,168 individual responses in the form of letters, petitions, and postcards. The Forest Team responded to each substantive comment in the Final EIS, Appendix A. The Forest Team also made many changes as a result of these comments, including additional analysis and refinement of the Selected Alternative 3M.

Public involvement and discussions continue. The Targhee Forest staff listened to all points of view and incorporated many suggestions. I am confident it is evident that the staff has listened, and that public involvement in this process has strengthened the Revised Plan. Appendix A in the Final EIS summarizes the public comments and is larger than the Revised Plan because we responded directly to every substantive comment. The Revised Plan reflects the fact that we considered public comments, although we did not make every change suggested by the public. Often comments were mutually exclusive. For example, some people want a particular area to remain roadless and others want that area available for motorized recreation activities. In making this kind of trade-off decision, I have looked at the broader picture and reached a balance I believe is workable.

## **Planning Records**

With all of the above collaboration with the public and other agencies and expertise from many Forest Service employees, an Interdisciplinary Team followed a revision process, completed the environmental analyses (summarized in the final EIS) and developed the Revised Plan from the Selected Alternative 3M. The Team has provided detailed explanations of the analysis and results of each revision process.



step in the process planning records. The final EIS includes references to the detailed planning records on file in the Forest Service office in St. Anthony, Idaho. These records can be reviewed at

Forest Supervisor's Office  
Targhee National Forest  
420 N. Bridge St.  
St. Anthony, ID 83445

## **ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED**

A brief description of the of the alternatives considered in this analysis follows. Important points in the development of each alternative include:

- The range of alternatives responds to the concerns and issues raised by the public, not on predetermined or unrealistic outputs
- All alternatives include the principles of multiple-use, sustained yield, and ecosystem management
- All alternatives share a set of basic goals and standards and guidelines which insure protection of Forest resources and compliance with applicable laws
- All alternatives, except the No Action, Alternative 1, achieve the purpose and need for a revised Forest Plan, based on the needs for change discussed previously
- All alternatives meet the management requirements of 36 CFR 219.17, and other legal and regulatory requirements

## **Objectives Shared by All Alternatives**

All alternatives will meet the following objectives established in the Intermountain Regional Guide:

- ~~Protect the basic soil, air and water resources.~~
- Provide for multiple uses and sustainability in an environmentally acceptable manner
- Provide for a quality of life through management of ecosystems
- Provide for scenic quality and a range of recreation opportunities that respond to our customers and local communities
- Emphasize cooperation with individuals, organizations, and other agencies in coordination of planning and project implementation
- Promote rural development opportunities
- In cooperation with other landowners, strive for improved landownership and access patterns, to the mutual benefit of both public and private landowners
- Improve the financial efficiency of all programs and projects

## **Alternative Descriptions**

The Forest Team analyzed seven alternatives in detail. Alternative 1 is the No Action Alternative, or a continuation of management under the 1985 Plan. As the numbers increase from Alternatives 2-6, they generally move consistently toward the following

- Greater protection of wildlife habitat
- Greater protection of riparian areas
- More protection in Bear Management Units
- More security for elk
- More nonmotorized, dispersed recreation opportunities
- More recommended wilderness
- Less cross-country motorized use
- Fewer open motorized roads and trails
- Reduced livestock grazing and timber harvest
- Fewer lasting visual impacts from management activities

### **Alternative 1 (No Action)**

The purpose of the No Action alternative is to show the current level of goods and services expected to be provided in the future if management of the Targhee National Forest were to continue under the 1985 Forest Plan. The 1985 plan has been updated with 24 non-significant amendments, requirements of court orders for grizzly bear habitat management, and changes needed to address habitat for new sensitive wildlife species in the last 10 years.

Timber harvest occurs at a high level within the management requirements for threatened and sensitive wildlife species like grizzly bears and goshawks. Vehicle access is slightly reduced over recent levels due to the requirements of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee Task Force Report, Grizzly Bear/Motorized Access Management, July 1994. Cross-country, motorized use in summer and winter would continue near recent levels. Grazing continues at current levels. Riparian, wildlife and recreation values are emphasized in specific areas of the Forest, consistent with the 1985 Plan. Alternative 1 recommends portions of the Lionhead, Italian Peaks and Winegar Hole roadless areas for wilderness designation. Legislative action is still needed to make these recommendations, the same as 1985, permanent.

### **Alternative 2**

The purpose of this alternative is to resolve the key issues by emphasizing cross-country winter access and timber production, while adding more restrictions to summer cross-country access. Use of motorized vehicles to retrieve hunted game is allowed on 58 percent of the Forest. Timber harvest occurs at the highest levels within the management direction required to maintain threatened, endangered and sensitive species habitat. Grazing continues at current levels. Vehicle access is slightly reduced from recent levels to meet Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) Guidelines. Riparian, wildlife and heritage resource values are emphasized in specific areas of the Forest. Alternative 2 does not recommend any wilderness designation.

### **Alternative 3**

This alternative responds to the key issues by emphasizing management of wildlife habitat and sustaining timber harvest levels within wildlife constraints. Grizzly bear recovery is enhanced with a reduction in motorized use allowed in each bear management unit (BMU). Grazing allotments continue at current levels and a larger percentage of riparian areas meet the desired vegetative condition. Cross-country summer motorized vehicle use is restricted to specific areas. Lionhead, Palisades and Italian Peaks, plus the Idaho portion adjacent to the Winegar Hole wilderness are recommended for wilderness designation.

### **Alternative 3M**

This is the alternative which emphasizes wildlife habitat management and provides more core areas for grizzly bears. Motorized access, timber harvest levels and livestock grazing are all reduced. Cutthroat trout are further protected with increased vegetation requirements along streams. Cross-country, summer, motorized vehicle use is restricted to specific areas. Lionhead, Palisades, a portion of Diamond Peak and Italian Peaks, plus the Idaho portion adjacent to the Winegar Hole wilderness are recommended for wilderness designation.

### **Alternative 4**

This alternative emphasizes watershed and wildlife habitat improvement and a reduction in timber harvest. Riparian areas have increased emphasis. Motorized access is restricted to designated routes and more roads are closed in BMUs than in previous alternatives. Lionhead, Palisades and Italian Peaks, plus the Idaho portion adjacent to the Winegar Hole wilderness and another 14,000 acres of presently roadless areas are recommended for wilderness designation.

### **Alternative 5**

This alternative addresses the key issues by reducing resource management by people and reducing human disturbances of wildlife and riparian habitat. Motorized access is restricted to designated routes and more roads are closed in BMUs than in previous alternatives. Lionhead, Palisades and Italian Peaks, plus the Idaho portion adjacent to the Winegar Hole wilderness and another 100,000 acres of presently roadless areas are recommended for wilderness designation.

### **Alternative 6**

This alternative meets the needs for change and addresses the key issues by de-emphasizing resource management by people and reducing human disturbance of wildlife and riparian habitat to the lowest level in all the alternatives. Timber harvest is not scheduled. All access is strongly restricted to designated routes and more roads and trails are closed to reduce human disturbances than in any previous alternative. Lionhead, Palisades and Italian Peaks, plus the Idaho portion adjacent to the Winegar Hole wilderness and another 340,000 acres of presently roadless areas are recommended for wilderness designation. Almost all the existing roadless areas retain their roadless characteristics.

Table ROD-1 Alternative Response to Key Indicators								
	Exist Level	Alt #1	Alt #2	Alt #3	Alt #3-M	Alt #4	Alt #5	Alt #6
Key Indicator - Sustainability								
- Thousands of acres where forest structure and composition maintained or improved	NA	48 5	58 6	52 9	45 2	39 8	29 8	20 7
Key Indicator - Riparian Health								
- Riparian acres (thousands) meeting Desired Vegetative Condition (DVC)	18 7	18 8	20 0	20 0	20 0	21 1	21 1	21 1
- moving toward DVC	5 3	4 9	5 2	5 2	5 2	4 9	4 9	4 9
-not meeting DVC	3 7	4 0	2 5	2 5	2 5	1 7	1 7	1 7
Key Indicator - Elk Security								
- Elk Vulnerability (EV) % of Forest meeting state thresholds	48	62	76	83	89	89	95	95
Key Indicator - Grizzly Bear Management within the Bear Management Units (BMU)								
- OROMTRD (open road and open motorized trail route density) (mi/sq mi) by subunit								
- Henry's BMU, Sub 1	0 83	0 64	0 62	0 63	0 55	0 44	0 52	0 55
- Henry's BMU, Sub 2	0 77	0 46	0 42	0 40	0 47	0 36	0 42	0 35
- Plateau BMU, Sub 1	0 91	1 08	1 37	0 85	0 58	0 63	0 60	0 74
- Plateau BMU, Sub 2	0 73	0 79	0 91	0 57	0 55	0 50	0 51	0 50
- Bechler/Teton BMU	0 76	0 59	0 63	0 51	0 50	0 43	0 42	0 42
Key Indicators - Access								
Miles of open roads	1,985	1,882	1,863	1,589	1,577	1,372	1,237	1,228
Miles of open trails	773	572	470	435	540	421	232	81
Key Indicator - Roadless Management								
Thousands of acres recommended wilderness	65	65	0	125	171	139	226	465
Key Indicators - Timber Harvest								
Allowable Sale Quantity in million board feet per year	60 Potential Yield	11	13	11	8	6	4	0

## REASONS FOR THE DECISION

My decision is to approve the Revised Forest Plan for the Targhee National Forest which accompanies the Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). I have made this decision after fully reviewing and understanding the alternatives and environmental consequences. Alternative 3M provides for

- healthy riparian areas by specifying management standards to restore systems within aquatic influence zones,
- improved elk security by decreasing the densities of roads and trails open for use,
- quality grizzly bear habitat to meet recovery goals by designating core habitat areas and restricting some activities by their season of use,
- a balanced mix of motorized and nonmotorized access by designating roads and restricting some activities by their season of use,
- retaining the roadless character of most existing roadless areas by using a management prescription (Category 3) that protects the roadless character of these areas for recreation use and future options,
- recommend high-quality areas as additions to the wilderness system,
- a flow of goods and services to help maintain local economies and lifestyles

The Forest Supervisor determined the major public issues, management concerns, and resource use and development opportunities that are addressed in this revision process, as set forth in the planning regulations (36 CFR 219.12(b)). During the revision process, I made several trips to the Targhee Forest, including meetings and field trips with the public and Forest Team. The Forest Team also made several trips to the Regional Office to brief my office on developments and progress.

Alternative 3M is the result of the alternative development and public involvement stages of the Forest Plan Revision process. Important considerations to protect the environment that have influenced my decision include

- Protection of the basic resources (air, soil, and water), as mandated by our agency's mission, vision and guiding principles, are provided for with the management standards and guidelines and monitoring items
- The local and national people who use the Targhee National Forest, the communities they live in, and the relationship of the Forest Service with people and local communities
- Economics and the role the Targhee National Forest plays in local, regional and national economies
- Science, both social and biological as it applies to the management of National Forests, and because people are an integral part of ecosystems and this Revised Plan

- The role of the Targhee National Forest to provide multiple use opportunities in the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem
- The role of fire in ecosystem dynamics
- The plans and policies of other government agencies (local, state, tribal and national), especially Snake River Activity Operations Plan
- The Forest Plan Revision considered and appropriately included existing scientific literature, including appropriate parts of the *Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project* scientific assessment (see References Cited in the FEIS)
- The applicable laws and policies that govern the development of a Forest Plan and for management of National Forest lands Endangered Species Act, Clean Water Act

The environmental consequences and cumulative effects of these factors are disclosed in the Final EIS, Chapter IV by alternative. Details of the analysis completed can be found in the process papers

## **Components of the Decision and Comparison to the 1985 Plan**

This decision is accompanied by the necessary supporting analysis and disclosure, summarized in the Final EIS, required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and its implementing regulations (40 CFR 1500). Also incorporated are the requirements of the National Forest Management Act (NFMA) and its implementing regulations (36 CFR 219). The six components of the decision made in every forest plan are

- 1. The establishment of forestwide goals and objectives.**
- 2. The establishment of forestwide standards and guidelines**
- 3. The establishment of management area direction.**
- 4. The designation of suitable timber land and establishment of an allowable sale quantity**
- 5. The establishment of monitoring and evaluation requirements.**
- 6. Recommendations for Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers.**

The descriptions that follow explain what these decisions mean for the Revised Targhee Forest Plan, and how they differ from the decisions made in the 1985 Plan

### **1. The establishment of forestwide goals and objectives.**

Goals and objectives are described in Chapter III of the Revised Plan. Goals are concise statements that describe a portion of the desired future condition (discussed previously) in broad terms that are timeless. Objectives are more concise, usually time-specific statements of a condition, outcome or purpose necessary to accomplish during this next decade to move toward reaching a certain goal and achieving the desired future conditions on the Targhee National Forest. Many of the goals are similar to the 1985 Plan, as the overall desired conditions for many resources have not changed. New goals have been added where we have learned from our activities and are beginning to understand how ecosystems function

Some specific examples of these are described under goals for properly functioning condition of ecological processes and patterns (Revised Plan, p III-4)

## **2. The establishment of forestwide standards and guidelines.**

There are changes in the standards and guidelines from the 1985 Plan, particularly the forestwide standards and guidelines. As we learned from implementation of the 1985 Plan, we have incorporated more resource protection standards and guidelines for management activities that will be implemented to achieve the objectives and goals, and move the forest conditions toward the desired future. Standards and guidelines are also in Chapter III of the Revised Plan. Some of these standards and guidelines apply forestwide and others apply to specific areas of the forest.

## **3. The establishment of management area direction.**

Land allocations have been decided by assigning a management prescription to each area of the Targhee National Forest. These prescriptions contain the goals, objectives, standards and guidelines to be used when any management activities are to occur on a particular piece of ground. The prescriptions are permissive in that they allow certain activities to occur and prohibit or restrict other activities, but they do not require management actions to take place.

The Revised Plan includes 45 separate management prescriptions to address specific needs or desired uses on a particular piece of ground. These management prescriptions have been grouped into geographic units called subsections to provide a locational perspective to the overall management direction. These subsections are much larger than the management areas used in the 1985, as there were 22 management areas and now there are seven subsections. I think this broader geographic grouping will help us better understand processes and patterns and how our activities affect the ecosystems.

Again found in Chapter III of the Revised Plan, these management prescriptions guide future management activities within each specific area. The basic categories for prescriptions are consistent with categories used in the Interior Columbia River Basin Ecosystem Management Project. The same basic categories will be used in future Forest Plan Revisions in the Intermountain Region, and are briefly described here including the acres allocated to each management prescription category for Alternative 3M.

Table ROD-2 Description of Management Prescription Categories		
Management Category	Acres	Percent of total Forest area
1 - Wilderness, Wilderness Study Areas and Recommended Wilderness	337,846	19
2 - Special Management Areas, Maintenance of Visual Quality, Research Natural Areas, Eligible Wild, Scenic & Recreation Rivers, Grizzly Bear Habitat, Elk and Deer Winter Range, Aquatic Influence Zones, South Fork of the Snake River	437,335	24
3 - Semi-private Nonmotorized Recreation and Motorized Backcountry Rec	242,165	14
4 - Developed and Special Use Permit Recreation Sites, Dispersed Camping Management	8,103	0 40
5 - Lands Suitable for Timber Management with General, Urban Interface, Big Game Security, Visual Quality Improvement and Maintenance, Grizzly Bear Habitat, Elk and Deer Summer Range Emphases	601,559	33 60
6 - Non-forested Rangeland	157,385	9
7 - not used because this group of management prescriptions do not fit any management situations on the Forest	-	-
8 - Concentrated Development Areas	4,639	0

**4. The designation of suitable timber land and establishment of the allowable sale quantity (ASQ). Designation of lands suitable for grazing and browsing. The identification of lands suitable and available for Oil and Gas Leasing.**

There are 703,100 acres of tentatively suitable timber land on the Forest. In Alternative 3M, 465,000 acres are suitable for timber management and the allowable sale quantity is 80 Million Board Feet (MMBF) for the next decade. There are more acres in Category 5 prescription areas than what is considered suitable (601,559 compared to 465,000) because prescription areas are typically large, contiguous areas and inclusions of unsuited land were not identified at the Forest scale. Land suitability will be evaluated on a site-specific basis. Fewer acres are identified as suitable for timber management than in the 1985 Plan because more recent inventories and subsequent improvement in mapping capabilities show about 290,000 more acres of non-forested land than the information used in the 1985 analysis. A further explanation of this can be found in the Final EIS (Chapter III) and in Process Paper C. After additional analysis between the Draft and Final EISs, some areas on the forest were added or deleted from the suitable timber land with no net change in the acres suitable for timber harvest.

The allowable sale quantity of 80 MMBF for the decade is an upper limit of harvest that can occur within the management direction in the Revised Targhee Plan. An estimated 32 MMBF of this will come from components of the Forest that have slopes greater than 40 percent, grizzly bear habitat areas (Prescription 5.3.5) or roadless areas. Any volume harvested from these areas is intended to be counted as a non-interchangeable component of the allowable sale quantity. This means that if the maximum 32 MMBF does not come from these components, it need not be replaced by timber volume from the



Table ROD-3 Acreage by Management Category, Ownership or Other Management Within Forest Boundary					
RX	NAME	TOTAL ACRES	RX	NAME	TOTAL ACRES
			3 2 (i)	Semi-Primitive Motorized	59,621
1 1 6	Wilderness, Opportunity Class I	102,34	3 2 (j)	Semi-Primitive Motorized	27,128
1 1 7	Wilderness, Opportunity Class II	19,565	4 1	Developed Recreation Sites	895
1 1 8	Wilderness, Opportunity Class III	12,572	4 2	Special Use Permit Recreation Sites	3,956
1 2	Wilderness Study, Snowmachine	49,236	4 3	Dispersed Camping Management	3,255
1 3	Wilderness, Recommended	154,13	5 1 (c)	Timber Management	82,459
2 1 1	Special Management Areas	13,627	5 1 3 (a)	Timber Management No Clearcut	34,354
2 1 2	Visual Quality Maintenance	10,000	5 1 3 (b)	Timber Management No Clearcut	13,924
2 2	Research Natural Areas	11,653	5 1 4 (a)	Timber Management Big Game	6,606
2 3	Eligible Wild River	21,709	5 1 4 (b)	Timber Management Big Game	126,437
2 4	Eligible Scenic River	15,132	5 1 4 (c)	Timber Management Big Game	23,354
2 5	Eligible Recreation River	8,833	5 1 4 (d)	Timber Management Big Game	2,898
2 6 1 (a)	Grizzly Bear Habitat	17,052	5 2 1	Visual Quality Improvement	7,017
2 6 2	Grizzly Bear Plateau Core	30,815	5 2 2	Visual Quality Maintenance	14,264
2 6 5	Grizzly Bear Bechler BMU	19,976	5 3 5	Grizzly Bear Habitat Out Core	216,480
2 7 (a)	Elk Deer Winter Range	82,257	5 4 (a)	Elk Deer Summer Range	13,300
2 7 (b)	Elk Deer Winter Range	37,585	5 4 (b)	Elk Deer Summer Range	14,289
2 8 3	Aquatic Influence Zone	163,97	5 4 (c)	Elk Deer Summer Range	46,176
2 9 1	South Fork Snake Scenic River	933	6 1 (b)	Range Management	157,386
2 9 2	South Fork Snake Recreation River	3,801	8 1	Concentrated Development Areas	4,641
3 1 1 (a)	Non-Motorized	46,070		Bureau of Land Managment	389
3 1 2	Non-Motorized	26,757		Bureau of Reclamation	20,837
3 2 (b)	Semi-Primitive Motorized	18,341		NFS (Non-Forest Service)	38,710
3 2 (c)	Semi-Primitive Motorized	9,309		Private	31,541
3 2 (d)	Semi-Primitive Motorized	5,118		State	25,702
3 2 (g)	Semi-Primitive Motorized	49,821		TOTAL ACRES	1,906,303

general suitable timber lands on the Forest. The specific breakdown of these non-interchangeable components is:

- slopes greater than 40 percent (maximum 0.7 MMBF for the decade),
- roadless areas within the Category 5 management prescription (maximum 11.3 MMBF for the decade),
- grizzly bear habitat within Category 5 management prescription (maximum 19.85 MMBF for the decade),

During implementation of the Revised Plan, all timber harvest will be analyzed on a site-specific basis.

Determination of land suitable for livestock grazing is another important consideration in this decision. Alternative 3M has 1,026,000 acres of suitable rangelands. These rangelands will continue to meet the needs of livestock permittees and grazing will continue to be a valued use of resources on the Targhee National Forest. The amount of suitable rangelands in Alternative 3M is slightly lower than in the 1985 Plan but will accommodate current livestock use.

With an emphasis on effective range management, monitoring and more clearly measurable standards and guidelines in the Revised Forest Plan, existing unsatisfactory rangeland conditions will improve. The quality of the rangelands in satisfactory condition will be maintained, as will the habitat for healthy herds of elk, deer and bighorn sheep. Integrated with this are the forestwide objectives to maintain and improve fish habitat, particularly cutthroat trout, protect and improve riparian areas and wetlands, and meet grizzly bear recovery goals.

The determination of areas available for oil and gas leasing and identification of protection clauses for leased areas will be disclosed in a separate analysis. The Draft EIS for this oil and gas leasing was issued for public comment October 1996, and a Final EIS is due to be released August, 1997. A decision on areas available for oil and gas leasing will be made when the Final EIS has been completed.

## **5. The establishment of requirements for monitoring and evaluation.**

This decision component provides a basis for periodic determination and evaluation of the effects of management practices. While the 1985 Plan also included monitoring items, we have learned much about what is useful monitoring, and what we can afford. The monitoring described in Chapter V of the Revised Forest Plan will ensure this management strategy works over the long-term. Forest staff developed a Monitoring Plan that identifies the minimum legal requirements for monitoring and other requirements that are important. Many of these monitoring items resulted from concerns expressed by the public. I have prioritized items into three categories. First priorities are mandatory to accomplish. Second and Third priorities will be accomplished as funds and partnerships are available.

## **6. Recommendations for Wilderness and Wild, Scenic and Recreation Rivers.**

This component of the decision considers any recommendations for additions to the National Wilderness Preservation System. The 1985 Plan recommended portions of three roadless areas (65,000 acres) be added to the three existing congressionally designated areas (2 wilderness, 1 wilderness study area) on the Targhee National Forest. My decision in the Revised Forest Plan retains these recommendations and adds an additional 106,000 acres of quality roadless area to be considered for addition to the Wilderness System by the US Congress. This helps balance the variety of goods, services and uses on the Targhee National Forest and leaves options available for future generations.

The other part of this decision component is determination of eligibility for inclusion in the Wild, Scenic and Recreation River System. A 1994 update to the inventory determined about 245.5 miles of rivers and streams were eligible to be included in the River System. This is only a minor change to the eligibility determinations identified in the DEIS. One creek was dropped from consideration after an analysis determined it did not have "outstandingly remarkable" qualities. A summary can be found in the Final EIS (Chapter IV) and details are covered in the Wild, Scenic and Recreational Rivers Eligibility Determination Process Paper R.

### **Comparison of Alternatives' Response to the Key Issues and Changes Made in response to Other Decision Factors**

Resolution of key issues was achieved by the emphasis placed on each decision component described previously (establishment of goals, objectives, standards and guidelines, management area direction, suitable timber, rangeland, and allowable sale quantity, monitoring and evaluation requirements; and wilderness and wild & scenic river recommendations). The alternatives varied in their ability to resolve each issue. A comparison of the differences among the alternatives I considered, and changes made in response to the comments on the draft documents follows.

#### **Key Issue 1: Sustainability, Fire and Natural Disturbances**

A variety of management approaches to sustaining ecosystems are available for use. Of primary concern are the use of fire and timber harvest in relation to their effects on the health of the forest structure and composition. The key indicators for this issue are acres where forest structure and composition is maintained or improved and acres where prescribed fire is allowed.

The alternatives varied in how many acres would be silviculturally treated to improve structure and composition, and where prescribed burning would be allowed. Alternatives 1, 2 and 3 improved structure and composition on the most acres, near 60,000 for the decade for Alternative 2 and 50,000 for Alternatives 1 and 3. Alternative 3M improved sustainability on almost 45,000 acres. Alternatives 4 is around 40,000 and Alternative 5 around 30,000 acres, and Alternative 6 improved the fewest acres at 20,000.

The range of acres where prescribed burning would be allowed varied less among the alternatives. Alternatives 1 allows prescribed burning on about 1,630,000 acres for the first decade, while the rest of the alternatives allowed prescribed burning on just over 1,750,000 acres.

Public comments to the draft documents included some that disagreed with the Forest Team's approach for range of natural variability, sustainability, patch size, succession, old growth, use or non-use of natural disturbances (fire, insects), forest health, viability and biodiversity. Many disliked our ecosystem

management definition or requested more clarification and monitoring. The Forest Team was challenged on the use of ecosystem management as being simply an opportunity to harvest more timber. Some wanted more scientific studies prior to adoption of the Final Plan, especially related to Yellowstone National Park and the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project.

I have modified Alternative 3M since the draft documents and changed the emphasis on identifying the range of natural variation. Many people thought the objective was to duplicate historical vegetation patterns, although this was not the case. I added forestwide standards and guidelines to identify ecosystems that are functioning properly and those that are at risk. Management activities will prioritize the "at risk" ecosystem for treatment to bring these back into proper functioning condition. I intend to limit harvest to 20 million board feet (20 MMBF) for the decade on those lands that were not identified as suitable for timber management. Such harvest would only be done to foster proper functioning condition like removing conifers from sagebrush grass ecosystems.

Some additional sites in the Henry's Fork Basin which represent good examples of ecosystems functioning properly were added as Special Management Areas. These will serve as barometers for other systems within the basin.

Other changes included placing more emphasis on the use of prescribed fire and managed natural fire to achieve desired soil and habitat characteristics, improve forest health, and create or maintain diversity in vegetative structure, composition and patterns. Additional objectives were added to develop Fire Management Plans throughout the Forest.

## **Key Issue 2: Riparian**

Although riparian areas constitute less than five percent of the total land base, they are the most productive areas in terms of plant and animal species diversity and consumptive use. A healthy riparian area indicates that most, if not all, of the water and soil components are also healthy.

The number of acres meeting the desired vegetation conditions for riparian areas was used as the key indicator for this issue.

Alternative 1 has just under 19,000 acres meeting the desired riparian conditions by the end of the decade. Alternatives 2, 3, and 3M have about 20,000 acres meeting the desired conditions. Alternatives 4, 5, and 6 would have the most acres meeting the desired vegetation conditions in riparian areas, just over 21,000 acres.

The primary concerns about riparian areas are the amount of vegetation which would be retained after grazing and other activities in riparian areas, primarily the height of the vegetation stubble remaining after grazing, concern over enforcement and monitoring of the standards, recreational use within the riparian areas, especially the allowance for camping and motorized use within 300 feet of the road, water quality limited streams, and interpretations of what management activities are allowed in these areas. Some people wanted more protection, monitoring and standards for fisheries, especially for native cut-throat trout, while others thought the management direction was too constraining on uses.

No changes were made to the height of vegetation stubble remaining after grazing activities because this standard is necessary to protect streambanks and to provide for a moderate rate of recovery of degraded riparian and aquatic systems together with a moderately high level of fisheries habitat quality. Additional objectives, standards and guidelines to address native cutthroat trout watershed were developed and added to the final Revised Plan. These include objectives to coordinate with the states of Idaho and Wyoming to

- 1) re-assess the health of native cutthroat trout populations within all seven subsections on the Forest,
- 2) use this information to further define species recovery needs and opportunities and to evaluate the effectiveness of the Native Trout Watersheds, and
- 3) determine which subwatersheds (drainages) within designated Native Trout Watersheds are non-essential to native trout recovery

Additional guidelines, modeled after the Inland Native Fish Strategy (INFISH) of June 1995 were added to meet the recovery objectives for native cutthroat trout. It is important to note that we intend to manage all native trout, fine spotted and Yellowstone, as sensitive, and site-specific impacts will be analyzed in a biological evaluation for each project affecting native trout habitat.

### **Key Issue 3: Security for Elk**

Security for elk was chosen as a key issue relating to future hunting conditions and opportunities and cooperative relations with fish and game departments. Observations and studies by agency and university scientists determined that as motorized road and trail densities increase, elk security declines. Portions of the Forest have high densities of trails and roads open to motorized use due to the extensive road building associated with the salvage of dead lodgepole pine. The percent of the Targhee Forest meeting the Idaho state elk vulnerability thresholds (measured by miles of open roads and open motorized trails) was used as the key indicator.

Alternative 1 provides the least security for elk, with 62 percent of the Forest meeting the state vulnerability thresholds. Alternative 2 is at 76 percent and Alternative 3 at 83 percent. Alternatives 3M and 4 are approximately at 89 percent. Alternatives 5 and 6 provide the most security for elk, with 95 percent of the Forest meeting the state vulnerability thresholds.

Many of the letters on this issue cited a variety of studies supporting or not supporting our road density standards, and our findings on the impacts of people and motorized use on wildlife. Strong feelings were expressed supporting or not supporting the use of off-highway vehicles because of wildlife hunting and viewing opportunities.

Overall, the open motorized road and trail density standards did not change from the draft documents. These density standards make the Forest road and trail system cost effective by requiring low-use roads to be closed, resulting in fewer miles to maintain. Access needs by people are integrated with other resource values, including elk, grizzly bear and native cutthroat trout. Public comments were used to identify specific motorized roads and trails which could be opened and still meet standards. The miles of open motorized roads and trails increased between Draft and Final by approximately 20 miles. The decision on exactly which roads will remain open will be made by Supervisor Reese as one of his first implementation decisions for the Revised Plan.

## Key Issue 4: Grizzly Bear Management

Portions of the Forest are within the Yellowstone Grizzly Bear Ecosystem which has been divided into Bear Management Units (BMUs) by the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) that developed the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan. Managing motorized access is one of the most influential parameters affecting grizzly bear habitat security. We now have better information on effective management of roads, timber and human activities in grizzly bear habitat. Miles of open roads and open motorized trails were used as the key indicator for grizzly bear management units.

Alternatives 1 and 2 provide the least grizzly bear habitat security with the greatest road densities in the bear management units (BMU), ranging from 42 miles per square mile in the Henry's BMU to 137 miles in the Plateau BMU. Alternatives 3 and 3M range between 40 miles per square mile in the Henry's BMU to 85 miles in the Plateau BMU. Alternatives 4, 5 and 6 have the most bear habitat security, ranging from 35 miles per square mile in the Henry's BMU to 74 miles in the Plateau BMU (Table ROD-1).

Management of grizzly bear habitat was one issue emphasized by local National Forest users. A meeting against any management for the grizzly bear was held in St. Anthony, ID, because some people thought the Forest Team had exceeded measures needed to protect the bear. Other groups supported our strategy for grizzly bear management or wanted more protection with even lower open motorized road and trail densities, and more core areas set aside.

The Endangered Species' Act requires certain elements for our grizzly bear strategy. We did note the public comments received, however, few changes were made except for the snowmobile change which is discussed later. The Final Revised Plan is consistent with the biological opinion of the US Fish and Wildlife Service. The objective to phase out sheep grazing in the BMUs as opportunities arise (such as when a sheep allotment permit expires) remains as it was in the draft documents, to reduce the chances of sheep and grizzly bear conflicts. The reduction sustained as a result of this phase out amounts to approximately 4,000 animal unit months (AUMs) on nine allotments, or about three percent of the permitted AUMs currently allowed on the Targhee National Forest. Some modifications were made to the standards and guidelines in the grizzly bear habitat prescription, in addition to the snowmobile changes listed under sub-issues, to clarify management practices and allow as much flexibility as is possible under the existing situations.

## Key Issue 5: Access

Recreational motorized use has increased over the last decade. The 1985 Plan allowed cross-country motorized travel across much of the Forest and did not establish road density standards. Road closures provide more protection and fewer impacts on wildlife, threatened, endangered, and sensitive species, soils and water, and fisheries, less visual, garbage and noise pollution, reduced maintenance, and more nonmotorized opportunities for escape and solitude. Open roads and trails allow more access for hunting, fishing, berry-picking, developed camping, hiking and other recreational pursuits, increased opportunities for sight-seeing, challenging cross country travel for off-highway vehicles, and greater access for persons with disabilities and the elderly. The key indicators for access are the total miles of roads and open trails available for motorized use on the Forest.

Alternatives 1 and 2 provide the most open roads and trails, about 2,500 - 2,300 miles available for motorized use. Alternatives 3 and 3M provide slightly fewer open roads and trails, at 2,000 - 2,100 miles. Alternatives 4, 5 and 6 reduce the open roads and trails the most, with about 1,800 to 1,500 to 1,300 miles available for motorized use, respectively.

Motorized access is the most controversial of the seven key issues. Many people in the local area thought too many roads and trails were being proposed for closure, especially in grizzly bear and elk country, and too many restrictions on motorized use overall were considered in the draft documents. A few motorized recreation user groups wanted us to use studies that were being used on other Idaho forests which do not equate road use at the same level as trail use. After reviewing these comments, we completed this analysis and a comparison is shown in Chapter IV of the EIS. Other letters strongly suggested that we needed to decrease the miles of roads and trails that are open for use, and establish better enforcement because many of the existing closures are ineffective (based on the Road Scholar study). Our analysis methods were questioned, particularly the accuracy of the road inventory (inventory process is summarized in the Access Appendix C in the Final EIS).

Between the draft and final EISs we reviewed our inventory and found that the number of roads and trails that currently exist was less than what was displayed in the draft EIS, this figure has been corrected in the final EIS. The Forest Team made additional changes in response to public comments including restricting cross-country snowmobile access on all areas mapped as winter range on map #24 in the final EIS map packet, and making some minor changes in open road and trail density standards in the Palisades/Big Hole area. Overall there was an increase in the miles of roads and trails open for motorized use.

I am deciding to specify the maximum allowable road densities (miles of roads and trails open for motorized use per square mile) by the management prescriptions area described previously. Forest Supervisor Reese will decide which roads will be open to achieve these road density standards as one of his first implementation decisions. This discussion will be based on the analysis shown in Appendix C of the Final EIS and will be made shortly after the decision made here.

#### **Key Issue 6: Management of Roadless Areas**

As motorized recreation demands increased, public debate increased over whether or not the Forest should maintain the roadless character of the remaining roadless areas. Recommending more acres be congressionally designated as wilderness ensures protection from resource uses and national recognition of wilderness character. Allowing areas to remain roadless, but not as recommended wilderness, keeps more options available for the future. Fewer acres recommended for wilderness could allow more motorized access for recreation, oil and gas, timber and other industries.

Alternative 2 recommends the no roadless acres be added to the wilderness system and Alternative 6 recommends the most at 465,000 acres. Alternative 1 maintains the areas recommended in the 1985 Plan (65,000 acres).

Alternatives 3, 3M, 4 and 5 recommend increasing amounts, 125,000 to 171,000 to 139,000 to 226,000 acres, respectively.

This issue generated the most comments on the draft EIS and draft Revised Plan. Many comments either wanted more wilderness or less. Other letters addressed concerns for continued motorized use in roadless areas and areas recommended for wilderness, especially cross-country use. We were asked to prepare a supplemental draft EIS because some people thought our analysis was flawed. In the letters that supported more wilderness, people listed specific roadless areas they wanted to be recommended for wilderness. The draft documents were updated to reflect the most recent information and did not find a significant change in the results of the analysis, so no supplement was prepared.

Based on a review of roadless areas, the Alternative 3M recommends a moderate 171,000 acres be included in the wilderness system by legislative action, about 46,000 more acres than were analyzed in the draft EIS for Alternative 3M. The Diamond Peak roadless area has been added as recommended wilderness, based on its high wilderness capability rating.

There is a demand for backcountry recreation, both motorized and nonmotorized experiences and we have more management options available to satisfy that demand in a non-wilderness setting. The option is also preserved to include these areas in future wilderness recommendations with designation now of the semi-primitive management prescription. Alternative 3M allocates about 240,000 acres of roadless areas on the Targhee National Forest to a Semi-Primitive Motorized or Non-Motorized Management Prescription. These areas will remain roadless during the next decade.

### Key Issue 7: Timber Harvest

Higher levels of timber harvest aid the local economy, better maintain the 25 percent payments to local governments, maximize the removal of the remaining dead or mature wood and assist in faster regeneration of the fire-dependent lodgepole pine. A reduction in timber harvest results in fewer impacts from motorized trail and road uses on wildlife, riparian areas, soils and water, aesthetics and other resources. In the past decade, large scale salvage of dead and dying lodgepole pine timber was conducted at levels that could not be sustained. Since the harvest of dead timber has largely been completed, we are now in a rest and recovery mode until higher levels of timber harvest can be sustained.

The alternatives ranged from 130 MMBF for the decade in Alternative 2 to 110 MMBF in Alternatives 1 and 3. Alternatives 3M, 4 and 5 go 80 MMBF to 40 MMBF respectively. Alternative 6 would have no harvest during the next decade.

	Exist Level	Alt #1	Alt #2	Alt #3	Alt #3-M	Alt #4	Alt #5	Alt #6
ASQ volume (MMBF/year)	60 Potential Yield	11	13	11	8	6	4	0

This issue drew major disagreement by those who commented on timber harvest. A local organized group called CUFF (Citizens For A User Friendly Forest), congressionals, legislators, county commissioners and many locals wanted more allowable sale quantity (ASQ), comments said the allowable sale quantity should be between 8 MMBF and 20 MMBF when specific numbers were used. Environmental groups wanted us to retain the ASQ of 3.7 MMBF as proposed in the DEIS, with more proposed wilderness and no below cost timber sales. A few people who commented wanted more firewood, especially for businesses.

Letters from some local elected officials in the Upper Snake River Valley, expressed concern over the future of the timber industry in the Upper Snake River Valley. They asked us to take another look at how various constraints on the suitable timber acres were applied in our analysis in the DEIS, and to select an alternative that assures a sustainable level of harvest but accomplishes harvest in an environmentally sound and aesthetically pleasing way.



Between the draft and final EIS, we found the model that estimates ASQ had been constrained more than necessary to model the effects of standards and guidelines, particularly the constraint on acres hydrologically disturbed in a watershed and the constraint to meet goshawk habitat needs. The limits on which acres could be available for harvest and meet the management direction for each alternative had been applied too narrowly. The model was changed, resulting in almost twice as many acres available for harvest in the next decade. This increase in acres also results in about twice as much timber volume estimated to be available. These changes are proportionately the same for all alternatives considered in the draft EIS. This re-analysis is summarized in Chapters II and IV of the final EIS. Details can be found in Process Paper B.

Although the acres available for timber harvest and corresponding volume estimates doubled from those disclosed in the draft EIS, the percent of the total forested acres that are proposed for treatment changed from about 1.0 to 1.5 percent, while the percent of tentatively suitable acres changed from 1.5 percent proposed in the draft EIS to approximately 3.0 in the final EIS. It was because of the comments received on the draft EIS that the change was made. Because the change is in how the management direction was modelled, and not a substantial change in the proposed action, I determined this was not significant new information that would require preparation of a supplemental draft EIS. The changes are proportionately the same for all alternatives considered, so the comparison of the effects is still proportionally the same as displayed in the draft EIS. In addition, the small percentage change in the forested acres treated did not significantly change the environmental effects displayed in the draft EIS.

The salvage operations of the 1980s, combined with the Endangered Species Act, the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan and Guidelines, ecosystem management principles, the reduced availability of dead lodgepole, increased knowledge about the impacts of motorized use of roads and trails upon the Forest's resources, and other factors described in the final EIS, result in a reduced availability of timber for harvest for the next decade, when compared to the 860 MMBF allowed in the 1985 Plan for the past decade. This is why the allowable sale quantity has been calculated at 80 MMBF for the next 10 years in the selected Alternative 3M. The amount of firewood estimated to be available in the next decade is 38 MMBF.

## Other Decision Factors

The following issues are important, but the key indicators did not vary much among the alternatives considered. An overview of the response to the comments received is given here. I encourage readers to review Appendix A of the final EIS where detailed responses to all substantive issues posed by those who commented on the draft documents can be found.

### Old Growth

As described in the Final EIS, there are several reasons why responsible management should include retaining old growth forest areas. Of concern is how much old growth occurs on the Forest, how much land to retain in an old growth stage, and what constitutes old growth.

To respond to public comments, an analysis of 412 permanent forest inventory plots was completed to assess what percentage of the forested acres meet the old growth characteristics as described in the Intermountain Region Old Growth publication (see Process Paper D). Several guidelines were added to the final Revised Plan that apply to the management and retention of old growth and late seral forested areas. These include management direction for the retention of coarse woody debris and the inventory

and assessment of old growth and late seral forest stages during project planning. Identification of replacement forested acres to provide future old growth areas is planned in case a catastrophic event reduces the level of old growth below the minimum amount desired in a watershed.

### **Winter Range**

Winter range for deer and elk is an integral part of the Targhee National Forest. Several people who commented stated that cross country snowmobiling should be restricted in winter range. Some letters requested crucial winter range for moose be designated.

The Forest staff met with representatives from both Idaho and Wyoming State Fish and Game Departments and agreed on the boundaries of crucial winter range on the Forest. Motorized cross country snowmobile restrictions were applied to these areas. I have included these refinements in Alternative 3M. They are displayed on map #24 of the final EIS map package.

### **Goshawks**

Goshawks are a sensitive species that use much of the Forest for nesting and foraging. We received letters stating the guidelines in the Draft Plan were too restrictive and not restrictive enough, and that we should use or not use the southwest guidelines developed to provide for goshawk habitat.

Following re-analysis of the guidelines, additional literature review and examination of forest inventory data, I have decided to keep the guidelines in the final Revised Plan essentially the same as in the draft. I did make some minor changes in snag numbers and management opportunities within goshawk territories. These are patterned after the Southwest guidelines and meet goshawk habitat needs in all alternatives.

### **Bighorn Sheep**

Maintaining historical habitat for bighorn sheep and preventing potential conflicts between domestic sheep and bighorn sheep was of considerable concern to some local biologists. Concerns included disease transfer potential, recreational use levels and lack of prescribed fire as a management tool to maintain historic ranges.

A task group composed of Forest personnel reviewed current literature, mapped bighorn sheep locations in relation to domestic sheep allotments and conducted telephone conversations with veterinarians with experience in this subject. Current restrictions within allotment management plans in bighorn sheep habitat areas reduce risk of disease transmission to low levels. However, some risk of disease transmission exists wherever bighorn sheep can come in nose to nose contact with domestic sheep.

Therefore, based on this additional review, I have decided to phase out domestic sheep grazing on an opportunity basis. This means that as sheep grazing permits expire, they will not be renewed in areas of the forest that currently support populations of bighorn sheep. This reduction amounts to approximately 2,600 AUMs on five allotments and one permit. There are two allotments within both grizzly bear and bighorn sheep habitat that will also be phased out on an opportunity basis and this reduction is about 1,800 AUMs.

## **Motorized Game Retrieval**

Many comments on this issue opposed motorized game retrieval for similar reasons as some Forest employees. They are difficult to enforce, favoritism is perceived for hunters with off-highway vehicles, and obtaining the required permit is impractical in most situations. I have decided not to include this concept in the final Revised Plan.

## **Snowmobiling and Heliskiing**

Many comments (over 500 letters were received before the official comment period began) opposed restricting snowmachines to designated trails in the grizzly bear units before Dec 15 and after April 1. Some groups wanted unrestricted cross-country snowmobile use, except in winter range, while others wanted no snowmachines, heliskiing, or any motorized use in roadless areas proposed as wilderness. Heliskiing companies and patrons want to be allowed to use roadless areas that are proposed for wilderness, especially in the Palisades area.

To address the issue a Forest task group reviewed data between draft and final documents to determine the average grizzly denning time for the area, location of dens (including an analysis done with information available on the geographic information system (GIS) to identify areas of high denning potential), and the number of conflicts that have been recorded between grizzly bears and snowmachines.

Based on this analysis, I have deleted the seasonal cross-country snowmobile restriction from all grizzly bear management prescriptions and replaced it with a standard to develop site-specific restrictions to resolve potential conflicts with grizzly bears during their denning time. I did this because we are not aware of any recent conflicts, and most of the area in question is not particularly desirable grizzly bear denning habitat. Desirable denning habitat is usually on steep slopes in timbered areas, typically not the area where most cross-country snowmobile use occurs. Problems identified can be addressed with site-specific analysis and restrictions as necessary. The US Fish and Wildlife Service concurred with this analysis in their Biological Opinion.

## **Centennial Mountain Range**

Several comments opposed vegetation management in this area, particularly timber removal of Douglas-fir to regenerate decadent aspen. A large number of comments recommended this area be preserved as a wildlife corridor (primarily for grizzly bears and wolves) between Yellowstone National Park and other Montana, Wyoming and Idaho roadless areas. The Greater Yellowstone Coalition and many of their members submitted a new management prescription for the Centennial range to address this concern.

Habitat connectivity is important. After comparing the Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan with Alternative 3M, I conclude the activities that could occur in the Centennials will maintain this area as a potential linkage zone. The Recovery Plan also says that management prescriptions to maintain linkage potential should be similar to big game summer range prescriptions that address access management. The management prescriptions applied to this area in Alternative 3M address habitat connectivity by providing appropriate road density standards and maintaining ecosystem compositions to provide wildlife security cover. Except for some minor boundary refinements because of the updated roadless inventory, I have decided to keep the management prescriptions for the Centennial Mountain Range the same as those disclosed in the draft EIS.

## **Native American Treaty Rights**

Government to government consultation was conducted with the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe on both the draft and final Revised Plan. We received formal substantive comments from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe on the draft documents. Most of the comments were critical of the consideration given to Native American treaty rights. Forest personnel and Tribal members have different interpretations. The Tribes interpret their legal right to hunt, to include fishing and gathering and harvest of wood products owned by the Federal government. Following a review of the Fort Bridger Treaty and the relevant case law, it has been determined that the treaty rights do not encompass the gathering of wood products. No changes were made from the draft documents to address the gathering of wood products, and the Revised Plan does not infringe on Native American Treaty Rights.

Other comments received from the Shoshone-Bannock Tribe concerned access, cultural resource sites on grazing allotments and planning. A forestwide standard has been added to the final Revised Plan to address Tribal coordination. Procedures were also added to assure protection of cultural resources on grazing allotments.

## **Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project**

Some public comments questioned the relationship of the Revision with the Interior Columbia Basin Ecosystem Management Project science and EIS efforts. The Revision included appropriate parts of the scientific assessment. The Upper Columbia River Basin EIS decisions will not cover the Targhee National Forest.

## **FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS**

I have considered the multitude of statutes governing management of the Targhee National Forest and believe Alternative 3M is the best possible approach to harmonizing the current statutory duties of the Forest Service. Specific findings follow.

The Targhee Revised Plan is in compliance with the Clean Water Act because of the conclusions presented in Chapter IV, water quality section of the FEIS.

The Targhee Revised Plan is in compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act because of the conclusions presented in Chapter IV, Heritage Resource section of the FEIS.

The Targhee Revised Plan is in compliance with the Endangered Species Act and the US Fish and Wildlife Service Biological Opinion because of the conclusions presented in Chapter IV, Wildlife section of the FEIS. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has determined that the Revised Forest Plan may affect but is not likely to adversely affect the threatened bald eagle, Ute ladies'-tresses and the endangered peregrine falcon. The Service concurs that the Revised Forest Plan will not jeopardize the continued existence of the experimental, non-essential population of gray wolf. The Service has also determined that the implementation of the Revised Forest Plan is not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem grizzly bear population. No critical habitat has been designated for the grizzly bear, therefore, none will be affected.

~~The Targhee Revised Plan is in compliance with the Clean Air Standards because of the conclusions presented in Chapter IV, Air Resources section of the FEIS.~~

## **The Environmentally Preferred Alternative**

Although Alternative 6 would allow the fewest ground disturbing activities, I am identifying the selected Alternative 3M as environmentally preferable based on the following interpretation of the law and agency policy.

Regulations implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) require agencies to specify the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable (40 CFR 1505.2(b)). Forest Service policy further defines environmentally preferable as an alternative that best meets the goals of section 101 of NEPA. Ordinarily this is the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment and best protects, preserves, and enhances historical, cultural, and natural resources. In some cases there may be more than one environmentally preferable alternative (FSH 1909.15-05).

Section 101 of NEPA declares national environmental policy, calling on federal, state and local governments and the public to create and maintain conditions under which humans and nature can exist in productive harmony. This broad policy is further defined in six goals.

(1) fulfill the responsibilities of each generation as trustee of the environment for succeeding generations,

(2) assure for all Americans safe, healthful, productive, and aesthetically and culturally pleasing surroundings,

(3) attain the widest range of beneficial uses of the environment without degradation, risk to health or safety, or other undesirable and unintended consequences,

(4) preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage and maintain wherever possible an environment which supports diversity and variety of individual choice,

(5) achieve a balance between population and resource use which will permit high standards of living and a wide sharing of life's amenities, and

(6) enhance the quality of renewable resources and approach the maximum attainable recycling of depletable resources

The goals of Section 101 are similar to the principles of ecosystem management and of this Revised Plan, calling for sustainable and balanced use, and provision for future generations. Section 101 does not call for the exclusion of Americans from use of their natural resources, but does demand that such uses avoid degradation of the environment. Alternative 3M best meets the goals of Section 101 of NEPA. By this standard, the selected Alternative 3M is the environmentally preferable alternative for the Revised Targhee Forest Plan.

## IMPLEMENTATION

The Forest Supervisor will accomplish many management activities to implement the Revised Forest Plan. Unlike the programmatic decisions listed above, these activities are site-specific and require analysis and disclosure of the activity's effects under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). These site-specific analyses will be done during implementation of the Revised Forest Plan.

Forest plans are permissive in that they allow, but do not mandate, certain activities to occur. Site-specific analysis of proposed activities will determine what can be accomplished. The outputs specified in the Revised Plan are estimates and projections based on available information, inventory data and assumptions.

All activities, many of which are interdependent, may be affected by annual budgets. The Revised Plan is implemented through various site-specific projects such as wildlife habitat improvements, campground development, road building and timber sales. Budget allocations for any given year may require re-scheduling projects. However, the desired future conditions, goals, objectives, standards and guidelines and management prescriptions described in the Revised Plan may not change unless the Plan is amended. If, over time, funds received are significantly different from those necessary to implement the Revised Plan, the Plan may need to be amended. This would likely reflect different outputs and environmental conditions from those disclosed in this revision analysis.

Implementation of this decision will occur 30 days following publication of the notice of this decision in the Federal Register. Resource plans, permits, contracts, and other instruments, when necessary, shall be revised as soon as practicable to incorporate the revised management direction.

As one of the first steps to implement this Revised Plan, the Targhee National Forest Supervisor will issue a separate Record of Decision for Travel Management that designates which roads and trails are open for motorized use. I am deciding now which standards, by management prescription area, apply to meet the desired open road and trail densities.

The proposed open motorized roads and trails are displayed on summer and winter access maps for Alternative 3M. A separate Travel Plan map will be available when Supervisor Reese makes his implementation decision.

## APPEAL

This decision is subject to appeal pursuant to the provisions of 36 CFR 217. A written notice of appeal must be filed within 90 days following the date of publication of this decision in the Federal Register. The appeal must be filed with the reviewing officer:

Chief, USDA - Forest Service  
14th and Independence, SW  
201 14th Street  
Washington, DC 20250

A copy of the appeal must simultaneously be sent to the deciding officer:

Regional Forester, Intermountain Region  
USDA - Forest Service  
324 25th Street  
Ogden, UT 84401

Notice of appeal must include sufficient narrative evidence and argument to show why this decision should be changed or reversed (36 CFR 217.9). Requests to stay approval of the Revised Forest Plan will not be granted (36 CFR 217.10(a)).

Decisions on site-specific projects are not made in this Revised Forest Plan. Final decisions on proposed projects will be made after site-specific analysis and documentation in compliance with NEPA, and are subject to appeal at that time. Recommended wilderness designations contained in the Revised Forest Plan are nonbinding recommendations and not a decision within the context of appeal regulation and are not subject to appeal (36 CFR 217.4(4)).

More information on the final EIS and Revised Forest Plan may be obtained by contacting the Targhee National Forest Supervisor in St. Anthony, ID. Reviewers are encouraged to check with the Forest Supervisor on the Revised Forest Plan decisions before submitting appeals to determine if concerns or misunderstandings can be clarified or resolved.

Forest Supervisor, Targhee National Forest  
USDA - Forest Service  
420 N. Bridge Street  
St. Anthony, ID 83445



## CONCLUSION

I am pleased to announce this decision and bring the Forest Plan Revision to its beginning. This Revised Forest Plan is a framework for the present and a positive direction for the future. Now is the challenge before us all to work together, the public, Forest Service, ranchers, conservationists, preservationists, snowmobilers, campers, hunters, timber industry, and all of the others who have an interest in Forest management. Together, we must overcome the challenges, realize the opportunities, and achieve the goals and objectives of this Forest Plan.

We are committed to the philosophy of adaptive management as we work together to implement this Plan. We will monitor our activities, the condition of the land as projects are completed, the products produced, and the effectiveness of the resource protection measures included in the Revised Plan. Most importantly, this Plan is our commitment to the future to ensure healthy, resilient ecosystems for the next generation.



DALE N. BOSWORTH  
Regional Forester

April 15, 1997  
Date

Includes the Counties of Bonneville, Butte, Clark, Fremont, Jefferson, Lemhi, Madison, and Teton of Idaho and Lincoln and Teton Counties of Wyoming The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in its programs on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, political beliefs, and marital or familial status (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (braille, large print, audiotape, etc ) should contact the USDA Office of Communications at (202) 720-2791

To file a complaint, write the Secretary of Agriculture, U.S Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, or call 1-800-245-6340 (voice) or (202) 720-1127 (TTD) USDA is an equal opportunity employer